

KPS CONSULTING

“Building an Access Bridge in Technology and Telecommunications”

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March 30, 2005

Marlene Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Ex Parte Presentation
WC Docket No. 04-36

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On March 29, 2005, Judy Harkins, Gregg Vanderheiden, and the undersigned of the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Telecommunications Access met with Tom Chandler, Amelia Brown, and Leon Jackler of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, and Christi Shewman of the Wireline Competition Bureau to discuss the need for the FCC to take steps that will safeguard access by people with disabilities to Internet Protocol (IP)-enabled services. The following points were made:

Historically, competitive market forces have proven insufficient to respond to the needs of consumers with disabilities. Although when viewed collectively, people with disabilities comprise a significant portion of the American marketplace, when separated by disability, each disability group is too small to create enough pressure to influence market trends. As a consequence, the telecommunications industry has consistently failed to address the needs of people with disabilities unless ordered to do so by Congress or the FCC.

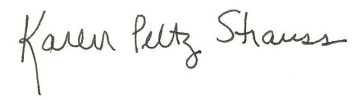
IP-enabled services can offer wonderful benefits for people with disabilities, but will do so only if the FCC steps in to make sure that the IP industry incorporates features that permit disability access now, while IP-enabled services are still being developed. If too long a period goes by, and these services are deployed without addressing accessibility needs, retrofitting them at a later time will be extremely burdensome and

expensive. This is precisely what occurred in the case of wireless services, when the wireless industry disregarded requests to make their products and services accessible to TTY, hearing aid, and cochlear implant users before deployment. When the FCC directed the industry to incorporate access after these services were rolled out, industry was forced to incur considerable expense.

In order to ensure access by people with disabilities, the following must occur:

- IP services need to be interoperable and reliable. At present, multiple industry standards have created a plethora of text channels that are unable to talk to one another or 911 services. Multiple formats exist for text transmissions over the Internet and for other kinds of text messaging, many of which are not compatible with each other. In addition, several standards now being adopted are unreliable: some of these work in the lab, but not in the field. The FCC needs to require a single, reliable text standard that is supported by all systems, so that deaf and hard of hearing people can enjoy the same integrated system of communication that is available to voice users.
- Text transmissions must be able to get through to their destinations to the same extent as voice transmissions. At present, firewall and gateway barriers sometimes block text, impeding communication by people who rely on text as their only form of communication. Otherwise stated, wherever voice can go, interactive text must also be able to go.
- People with disabilities must be able to use public IP phones. Most IP phones already have the capability to send and receive text. Users need to be able to display text on these phones as well. This will require software changes that are easily achievable.
- All relay systems, including IP-based relay systems, should be able to communicate with 911 services. There are various new technologies being developed that can help relay centers identify the appropriate 911 center for an incoming call.
- Relay users should not be locked into using one video relay service provider. In the event that the provider's service is busy, the user will have nowhere to turn. This is not fair to relay users, and in an emergency situation, it is extremely dangerous. NECA payments should not be permitted to providers who lock their systems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Peltz Strauss". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Karen Peltz Strauss
Legal Consultant, RERC-TA

cc: Jay Keithley
Tom Chandler
Leon Jackler
Amelia Brown